

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE MILDRED BYRNE

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

Interviewee: Alice Mildred Byrne

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Description

Alice Mildred Hinch Byrne, a native of Virginia City, Nevada, was born September 28, 1908, into a mining family that could trace its roots back two generations on the Comstock. She has lived in the Virginia City area all of her life. In 1924 she married John Patrick Byrne, who was also a third generation Nevadan; they had six children.

Alice Byrne is the granddaughter and daughter of miners. As such, she has been deeply immersed in the mining culture of the Comstock, and she reflects upon some of her family's experiences on the Comstock. She also reminisces about the various social activities and organizations miners and their families engaged in during the early years of the twentieth century.

During the 1930s and 1940s mining declined on the Comstock until it could no longer satisfy the economic needs of the community. The mining town in which Alice Byrne grew up began to decay. Ultimately tourism emerged as a new source of wealth for the community, but during the interim the Comstock passed through a difficult time.

Alice Byrne experienced this period of transition, and she discusses this time. Through her eyes the reader is permitted to view the determined effort of Comstockers struggling to keep their community and its traditions alive. The reader may be impressed by the Comstockers' good-natured acceptance of diversity and their faith in the ultimate viability of their community. Their success in this undertaking is eloquently testified to with the emergence of Virginia City as a major center of tourism within Nevada.

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AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

PREPARED FOR THE STOREY COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND THE STATE OF NEVADA,
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An Oral History Conducted by Ann Harvey
July 20, 1984

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim

as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible. There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

Alice Mildred Hinch Byrne, a native of Virginia City, Nevada, was born 28 September 1908 into a mining family that could already trace its roots back 2 generations on the Comstock. She has lived in the Virginia City area all of her life. In 1924 she married John Patrick Byrne, who was also a third generation Nevadan; they had 6 children.

Alice Byrne is the granddaughter and daughter of miners. As such, she has been deeply immersed in the mining culture of the Comstock, and in her oral history she reflects some of her family's experiences on the Comstock. She also reminisces about the various social activities and organizations miners and their families engaged in during the early years of the twentieth century.

During the 1930s and 1940s mining declined on the Comstock until it could no longer satisfy the economic needs of the community. The mining town in which Alice Byrne grew up began to decay. Ultimately tourism emerged as a new source of wealth for the community, but during the interim the Comstock passed through a difficult time.

Alice Byrne experienced this period of transition, and in her oral history she reminisces about this time. Through her eyes the reader is permitted to view the determined effort of Comstockers struggling to keep their community and its traditions alive. The reader may be impressed by the Comstockers good-natured acceptance of diversity and their faith in the ultimate viability of their community. Their success in this undertaking is eloquently testified to with the emergence of Virginia City as a major center of tourism within Nevada.



ALICE MILDRED BYRNE

1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE MILDRED BYRNE

Alice Mildred Byrne: My name is Alice Mildred Hinch Byrne. I was born in Virginia City on September 28, 1908. [I was delivered by] Dr. Hodgins at my grandmother's home, about 2 blocks down from the Catholic church on Taylor Street. My mother was Etta Julia Daley. My father was William Edward Hinch. I have one living brother, William Hinch. We buried another sister and brother, and 4 children died in infancy.

Ann Harvey: Could you tell me the full names of the children that went beyond infancy?

Yes. Catherine Hinch and Elmer Hinch

Who was the first member of your family to move to Virginia City?

My father's mother, Catherine Hinch, came to the territory [with] her family in 1861. At that time she was 13 years old.

What did her family do after she arrived?

[They] engaged in mining. I guess they came from Nova Scotia for economic reasons.

[My grandmother] married John E. Hinch after she came to Virginia City. She was married in 1873.

How many children did your grandmother and your grandfather have?

Seven. There was Nick, and Tesse, Martha, Susan, Gertrude, William and Ambrose.

If your grandmother married your grandfather in Virginia City then he must have arrived here in the early days, too. Could you tell me when he came to Virginia City?

My grandfather came here in the late 1860s. He and a cousin, John Tate, walked down from Canada to find employment. He was a skilled assayer, and he also ran the first diamond drill core that was taken from a Sierra Nevada mine in Virginia City. My grandfather died when my father continued his eighth grade of school, so I wasn't familiar with my grandfather.

Do you have any memories of your grandmother Hinch?

Yes. My grandmother was a delightful person, just the sort of grandmother you would always imagine. I always had the privilege of going to Reno and spending vacations with Grandma Hinch, and that's one of my fondest memories. Of course, I didn't remember my other grandmother [Joanna Cahill Daley] too well. She died when I was about 2 years old, but Grandma Hinch I remember quite well. Such a splendid person with a big family—and love enough to take care of them all.

If her husband died when they had young children, she must have supported them herself?

She had a rough time of it. I think her brother, Uncle Ned Hinch—her family name was also Hinch—he helped, but the amazing thing is that 2 of those girls were schoolteachers. My aunt Martha graduated from high school when she was 16, went to normal school and came back to teach students practically her own age in Virginia City [at the] Fourth Ward School. I guess she taught there a good 7-8 years. Aunt Tess was also a teacher. Aunt Tess was married to Sam Durkee who was the engineer for the Nevada Highway Department for many years. My aunt Martha, who was the schoolteacher at the Fourth Ward School, was married to Ruf Hendricks. He was sheriff of Storey County in 1909, and under Governor Boyle he was warden of the Nevada State Prison.

Did they live in Virginia City while he was warden or did they move?

No, they lived at the prison. They had their apartment (at that time they didn't have a separate house for the warden) right in the main building. That was the logical move, too, because all the men were so kind to us; they

just made our visits down there. Cook cooked extra cookies and goodies for us. He always had nice horses. We were delighted going out and riding the horses. It was a fun place for me obviously. [laughter]

Did you ever see any of the prisoners when you went out?

Oh, yes, they used to do the cleaning, the cooking, maintained the yards, and they had a quarry there. We weren't allowed in there, but we could see them working in the quarry, quarrying out the stone—doing things that were done around those days. Then the men raised pigs over across the street from there for their food. It was only an institution really.

Do you have any other memories of your aunts and uncles?

Just the family feeling that we grew up with and appreciated. It's still in my own family, and it's very precious to us.

Do you know when your mother's father moved to Virginia City?

Yes. [My grandfather] James H. Daley came here right after the big fire in 1875, and he worked on the pumps in the C & C mine. That was a very important job. They had to keep that hot water pumped out of the lower levels. They'd pump it up to [the] 1,600 [foot level], and then it'd go out the Sutro Tunnel. Of course, when they were having labor disputes or anything, it was important that they have those pumps manned, or water would have flooded the lower levels and they'd never be reopened again. You don't realize that each man had their own responsibility to fulfill, and it wasn't just go to work for 8 hours and call it a day.

Was flooding a major problem in the mines?

Yes, with the hot water it could have closed down mining operations easily.

Why do you think your mother's father moved to Virginia City?

Well, he came from a farm in Maine, and it was very hard to earn a living. It's hard to grow potatoes in a rock field. He much preferred mining.

Was your mother's father married when he came to Virginia City?

No. He was married after he came to Virginia City. He married about 1883. He married Joanna Cahill. Joanna had come to Virginia City from Ireland as a young girl. For some reason she lived for a period of time in Massachusetts and then was sent out West. I think it was a common practice in those days for the young Irish girls to be indentured for their passage, and then they'd work their way out. She worked for a family when she came to Virginia City, then married Grandpa Daley.

They had 2 girls and a boy. The boy died of pneumonia when he was 19 years old, so he never had a family. The other daughter married a Schweiss boy—the same Schweiss family that ran a brewery, made their own beer and delivered it around in kegs to homes and everything in Virginia City.

Could you describe the location of the brewery?

Well, at one time Schweiss's Brewery was up where the present firemen's museum is; there were other members of the Schweiss family connected with that. [Then they moved it] right down in back of there. There was a big 2-story place that they had a brewery

in. Grandpa Schweiss was the brewmaster, and Uncle Dick was his leading man. One of the other boys went to work on the railroad. They didn't care for the brewery business, but Grandpa Schweiss did have Richard well indoctrinated in it. He died during the flu in 1918.

Grandpa [Daley] lived till 1930 or 1931. I know he was a very husky, powerful man. He was anchorman on the tug-of-war team. That was a very proud position to hold. They said those men would lay there for hours holding the other team. Maybe one team wouldn't move an inch or 2, and maybe a man would get a cramp, and they'd say, "Can you hold it, Jim, if I get up and stretch?"

He'd say, "I'll hold them," and he'd lean back—they say he could have held a bull. He was very powerful.

Power is probably another reason why he died just when he was 61 years old. That ages you fast. You know, later on when they tried to revive these tug-of-wars they found out that you have to put a time limit on it. If you forget to put a time limit on it, why, here they are at a stalemate where one team can't move the other, and men are passing out just from holding the sheer weight of it. [laughter] That was the funny part. I remember one time they had a tug-of-war up in the Delta lot. It went on past the daylight hours. It was getting pretty dark, and all these spectators [were] standing around taking the oxygen that the tug-of-war team should have. somebody said to my mother, "Better get over here with your hat; this man's about to pass out."

My mother ran over, took her hat off and tanned him. [Then] somebody said, "Well, that's the Indian team. What are you doing fanning that man?" [laughter]

At what kinds of events did the people in Virginia City have the tug-of-war contest?

Oh, they'd always have [them at] a Labor Day celebration, and in later years—1925—chances are [they'd have them at] a Fourth of July celebration.

Did Virginia City often celebrate Labor Day?

Labor Day was a big celebration; then they'd have Fourth of July parades. They'd have a big return at the parades. I've seen pictures of the floats that they had around 1907-1908. They'd elect a queen, and you'd be amazed at the costumes and the floats that they would decorate. The floats died out at a later period; there wasn't so much of that work, but they were great for [a] parade. They'd have a band come up from Carson and play. Maybe have a baseball game. They were always great for baseball games here. In later years basketball and track teams took over.

Did the miners march in the Labor Day celebration?

Oh, yes, they had the Emmet Guard. They had all kind of lodges here with their beautiful paraphernalia, and each one tried to outdo the other—feathers and banners. There was no shortage of organizations to join: the Odd Fellows, the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, the Eagles. I remember the church had several banners. They had the Royal Order of Hibernians. All the church organizations had their own banners, and they'd turn them out for the parade.

Were the Fourth of July celebration and the Labor Day celebration pretty much the same thing?

Yes, pretty much the same thing. Of course, the Fourth of July was patriotic, and

Labor Day had more to do with the labor movement and mining occupations: drill teams drilling, the hard rock drilling contests, the single jack contest. That grew to be quite a tradition on the Comstock.

Was the Miners' Union active here?

Yes. It was the first organized miners' union in the United States, and it panned out pretty well. The Miners' Union Hall is up on B Street, right down from Piper's Opera House.

Do you remember what it looked like in the old days?

Pretty much as it is now except that [it] was open to the public. They were great for decorating—festoons and crepe paper and bunting all over. They always put a lot of color out around it.

They had a Miners' Union library. They had some very fine books there, all leather bound. I remember when they started first opening up for tourism, how people fought to buy one volume of those books and take them home. They were beautiful volumes. Then they [would] come back afterwards and tell you they made a cigarette case out of them for their coffee table and things like this. They weren't interested in the contents of the book at all! [laughter] It was just something nice to own.

Who could use the Miners' Union library?

I think it was open to the public. There was a time when the Mackay School of Mines sent professors up here to teach at the Miners' Union Hall.

That was around 1903, wasn't it?

Yes.

Do you know how long the Virginia City School of Mines lasted?

Well, seems to me it was still operating up to 1922. Professor Smith was up there, and some of the young men from the university would come up and take the course.

Did many of the miners in Virginia City take the course?

I don't believe so, not unless they were connected with the milling and the chemistry part of it.

Was there still a lot of mining going on in Virginia City after 1900?

Oh, yes. There was the Garfield Lode uncovered in 1916. That was a very rich strike. And American Flat where they had the largest mill in the world at the time. That operated during the 1920s. In fact, there were probably 60 families depending on mining here when World War II broke out. At that time they wanted the men either to go in the service or go to copper mines. Of course, that closed our mines down. The operators thought it would be just a matter of readjusting after the war—that they would be given the opportunity to reopen. But it didn't work out that way. If you don't keep a mine operating, it deteriorates fast. In some cases machinery was even sold for the junk price it would bring. [There was] no way of reestablishing themselves. Just the last couple of years United Mining has revived this interest, I'm happy to say. [laughs] I've been taken to task for saying that many times. [But] mining was a year around operation, and tourism's wonderful, but it doesn't last long enough.

Were miners a vital part of the community in the early 1900s?

Yes, they were. That's right.

Did they contribute a great deal?

Yes. They paid their way. They always paid a good wage on the Comstock. That had a lot to do with the operation. People were always content to work here. Looking back now, when you see what United Mine has installed—an automatic mill where you just push buttons and get your solutions for the mill extraction—you wonder how those men in the old days even crept through a little tunnel, like a little mole with a wheelbarrow. It wasn't a very romantic life to be sure.

They must have enjoyed their relaxation very much in the old days?

Yes, they made merry. [laughs] There was always something going on to keep them interested. In fact, they had rifle teams here in my grandfather's day, probably before 1910. They were very proud of their marksmanship. They'd go out and put up beautiful silver pitchers for prizes. Everybody had something to show that at one time or another they belonged to a rifle team. And again each organization would have their own rifle team to compete. I remember in 1918 or 1917 when they were leaving for World War I, every organization participated in a parade to send the boys off. Incidentally my brother-in-law, Bill Byrne, was the first draftee to leave Storey County in World War I.

Did the First World War hit Virginia City hard?

It hit it very hard. In no time at all, all the eligible young men were over in Europe.

Were there big celebrations when they came home?

No, they came home very anonymously; first thing you know they'd appear on the street. There was no welcoming home for them. And of course, they didn't see much romance in the war by that time. They were beginning to bring bodies back, too, and that made us realize that it wasn't fun and games they were playing.

Where did the menfolk hang out in Virginia City in the early 1900s? Was there a particular spot where they liked to go and talk to one another?

Well, they had a place called the Smokery. It was a pool hall. They were great to shoot pool. The bars had the same atmosphere as they do today—some place to go get the news of what was going on. Then there were benches lining C Street on both sides. In fact, they'd hang their turkeys out all dressed up for Thanksgiving dinner with the heads still on them, and there'd be a group of men sitting under them chewing tobacco and passing the time of day! [laughter] At the butcher shop you'd see the carcass of a cow setting out in the hot sun till they got ready to drag it inside.

Do you remember the name of the butcher shop?

Henry Nelieigh had a butcher shop. That was one of the oldest butcher shops; that was next to where the Bucket of Blood Saloon is.

What did it look like?

It was quite a bit as it is; the outside of that building hasn't been altered much at all. It's a brick building, and there's been no alterations made on it.

You mentioned the Smokery. What was that?

It was right down where the Bonanza Club is now, and then later on it was where the Delta building is. They called it the Smokery. In the wintertime they sold hot tamales and anything to bring in a little more trade.

Did the miners eat out a lot?

Well, they didn't have homes. There were so many single miners staying here without their families. There were probably 5 Chinese restaurants that served food—very good food, too—and most Chinese restaurants operated here till the days of the Depression.

Do you remember the names of those Chinese restaurants?

Yes, Charley Young, or Charlie Sam is probably the oldest restaurant. I know Charlie Ching had a restaurant, and other restauranteurs would be coming in, hiring other Chinese cooks and keeping it going. Charlie Ching and Charlie Sam were really 2 of the pioneer restaurant owners here.

There aren't too many Chinese living in Virginia City today. Are these families gone?

There's one. He has the Sharon House. It still sticks with the food line, and it's a delightful place to dine because he has a Victorian dining room and has many nice pictures of Virginia City in there. It's a delightful place to go.

Do you remember much about the Chinese?

I remember about the Chinese because my grandfather's home was just up above Chinatown. Chinatown was down on lower

Union Street, right straight down from C Street. That's where they had the josh house. They also had a mercantile store down there.

My mother remembered the Chinese funerals. All the kids would love to join the funeral cortege and go up where they were burying the Chinese. The body of the deceased would go first and then the mourners and then all the onlookers. The Chinese minister would ride at the rear of the procession, and he would be in a buggy drawn by a horse. He'd have these big cardboard boxes of red tissue paper like you see wrapped around firecrackers, and they were full of holes. The minister would go last. He'd have a hole punched in the box. He'd throw a handful of paper this way and a handful of paper that way. In the meantime the funeral proceeded to the grave site where they would bury the deceased. After they had filled the hole in, they would spread a white linen tablecloth and put cooked delicacies on it; this was a feast for the gods. Before the devil could get the soul of the deceased he had to go through every one of those holes in the little red papers that the minister would throw this way and that way. In the meantime the gods would come down, and if the food disappeared the gods were appeased. My mother said [if] you would go to one of these funerals and look right and left, there would be an Indian behind every pine tree waiting for the Chinese to go home. The gods were always appeased. There was never a crumb of food left. [laughs] She remembered that from being a small child. She was quite impressed. I thought what a thing to see and to pass on, that she had actually seen something like that. The burying ground was always east of the city. She said that was the big thing to do, go to a Chinese funeral.

I've been told that many of the Chinese worked in households as domestic. Is that correct?

They went to work as houseboys, yes. And they would usually take the name of the family they worked for. One that I knew about when I was growing up was Bud Kinkaid. He was Bud Kinkaid because he worked for the Kinkaid family. Lord knows what his Oriental name was. He was a very short little Chinaman, and he lived to be a ripe old age. But he was always Bud Kinkaid. The Indians had the habit of doing that, too. As they married they would take the names of the family they used to do washing [for], and the men would saw wood for families, or they'd bring in a load of wood on their back and maybe saw it for 25 cents, 50 cents.

Was there a large Indian community here?

We had 2 colonies of Indians. One out at the south end of town and one in the north end of town. They would compete against one another for the labor that was around the Comstock. They would play card games against one another, and they played a little game they made with little bones. They'd sit over in the sun by the freight depot. [When] the sun would get ready to go down they'd get up and go home. Occasionally the medicine men would come down. They'd have a big powwow, and they'd have bonfires going in the evening. I remember my mother [and] the neighbors; we'd all go down and get on the ore dumps where we could look down like in an amphitheater. We didn't want to join them because that looked a little wild. They'd just chant and dance around that fire for hours. [Besides] everyone respected one another. They all respected one another's rights.

Was Virginia City very cosmopolitan?

Yes, it was really a melting pot. You could find any nationality you might expect

to encounter in the geography occupied in Virginia City.

Could you name some of the various ethnic groups that were in Virginia City in the early twentieth century?

Yes, we had Cousin Jacks—the miners who came from Wales. They really knew their mining—they had been descendants of generations of miners in Wales—and they were welcome. And you'd have the Poles—we had a lot of Polacks here—Italians, French, Swiss Italians, Germans, and of course, always the Irish. We even had Finns. In my day there were a lot of Finns here engaged in mining, but I don't know where the group went. It's just amazing; if they knew anything about mines at all they seemed to come to the Comstock.

Did each of the ethnic groups have their own organizations?

Yes. They did, yes. That's true.

Can you remember some of their names?

Yes. One of the first ones we always say is the Royal Order of Hibernians; and then the APA. My grandfather had the greatest word of contempt [for them] because it was always the “dirty” APA. We were scared to repeat that because we thought it was something terrible. I was married before I found out that the APA was the American Protestant Association. [laughter] Wasn't near as bad as my grandfather led us to believe!

And then the Irish group from the Catholic church would organize a picnic which would be held at Bowers Mansion, and they had a special train for that. Mrs. Tannehill, who came from a pioneer Comstock family, told me about a woman [who] lived over in their

neighborhood right by the railroad tracks. Her husband was a Mason, and when the Irish Catholic train would be going by she would run up and down the track holding the American flag in one hand, with her husband's Masonic apron tied around the front of her, and she'd wave the flag as the train passed. No one could ever figure out if she was wishing them well, a very happy time on the picnic, or if she was threatening to have the Crown Point bridge collapse under the weight of the train.

The Masons were quite active here, weren't they?

Yes, they had a strong Masonic lodge—they still meet, the Odd Fellows and the Pythian organization. In fact my grandpa flinch was buried in the Pythian cemetery here.

Could you tell me something about the Knights of Pythias?

I know very little about it. I could never figure out why Grandpa was over in that hill and the rest [of the family] were all over in the Catholic cemetery. It was kind of like he was ostracized. [laughs] I never did get the story of it. He raised all his family Catholics, [but] probably it wasn't a strong thing with him. He had his own little plot. He lost a son 18 years old, just about 2 years after Grandpa Hinch died, and the son was buried over in the Catholic cemetery. For years Grandpa was the only member of my father's family in the Pythian cemetery. I was too young to ask questions, you know—I'd be told to mind my own business. I never did get the straight of that, why that happened that way. Of course, in the early days there was quite a division. You had to be raised and baptized a Catholic to be buried in [their cemetery]. But that has

all passed, too, because my father's buried with his father in the Pythian cemetery. The priest went up and blessed the grave that he lies in, so I guess they're getting along all right. We haven't had any repercussions on that setup.

Where did the Pythians meet? Do you know?

The Pythian hall is right next to the Eagles ball and the Miners' Union Hall on B Street.

Great, and I believe the Masons had a building?

The Masonic building was a beautiful building. It was one of the most beautiful buildings in town. It was located right off of Sutton Avenue on C, and it was such a nice building. I've been there. We had community banquets there in the 1920s. Then, someone got the idea it was going to collapse, so it was sold for the stone and the bricks in the building. Some of the furnishings, I think, were put in the Masonic Temple in Reno—the altars and things. I managed Piper's Opera House for 16 years. Masons would come here from all over the United States, and they were amazed when they'd see the pictures of that building. To think that it was torn down for the materials, and they said an assessment of a penny on every Mason in the United States would have saved that building. In fact, when they got back to the back wall, it was so sturdy they contemplated putting a little dynamite under it to shake the wall loose. It's sad when buildings like that are taken from the face of the earth, really. Of course, in that day the weather was hard on the mortar they used and everything, but they've done such wonderful restoration work the last 35 years. It's a shame when you look back and see that building could have been here today.

What other organizations were active in Virginia City in the early 1900s?

Well, I know the National Guard had a splendid rifle team. They always turned out for parades and were among the sharpshooters who went out shooting for the trophies. And [the] Eagles were very much in evidence—most all the miners belonged to the Eagles lodge at that time. And the Knights of Pythias would parade in their full regalia, and the Odd Fellows had a parade regalia, and the Masons, [and the] Knights Templar—they still come up when we have a church celebration. It's quite a treat to see the Knights Templar turn out in a body to greet the church dignitaries. A hundred years ago they wouldn't have permitted that. [laughter]

Did all the various ethnic groups and the various organizations live here happily together?

They did. As I said, it was a melting pot, and everybody was a neighbor and a friend to their next-door neighbor. They took care of the wants. When somebody'd say that Mrs. So-and-so's sick, why, 2 or 3 of the neighbors would come out [with] an armful of sheets and an armful of towels, and they'd rush down [to help] like that was a sure cure for what ailed her.

Do you want to tell us something about your father? Where did he go to school?

My father went to school at Virginia City schools: the First Ward School and the Fourth Ward School. His father died when he finished the eighth grade, and he felt he had all the education he wanted. He loved to chase wild horses—he'd join anybody going out for a wild horse roundup. He worked in the mines. He also worked for the Virginia

City Fire Department. He was relief fireman. They had 2 regularly paid men in the old firehouse where they had a watchtower—they could look over the whole territory. Then, of course, they had the horses and the fire cart. If they had a bad event downtown where they needed transportation, they would call out the fire cart, bring it down, chain the ruffians up to the fire cart, drag them up to jail—the city motel—and incarcerate them [until] they were sobered up enough to leave on their own. That was some sight to see. The fire cart was really a part of the law enforcement.

You mentioned that they liked to chase mustangs. Was this a community activity?

No, we had livery stables. You must remember that was the mode of transportation, and even then there were herds of wild horses roaming out north. There were a group of people here that would like nothing better than to get a buckboard together, go out there, set up camp, round up those wild horses, rope the mustangs, break them as saddle horses, bring them in, and sell them or keep them for themselves. They'd live all year long for that roundup—to go out and brand the colts. They weren't branded, you know, and anything they branded was claimed.

Where were the livery stables in town?

Well, there was a livery stable right by where the present firehouse is; there was a livery stable further up the street, across from the Masonic Hall; and then there was one up where the Wells Fargo building is—where the Wagon Wheel restaurant is now. That was a leading livery stable. There was also a livery stable almost at the corner of B and Taylor Street, where you could rent carriages for

funerals, weddings or what have you. Maybe you wanted to go down to Dayton to go for the fifteenth of August celebration, Santa Maria Day. You'd go to the livery stable and reserve your carriage weeks in advance to make sure you got down there. That was a thrill, to get a team of horses from the livery stable to take you down to Dayton for the fifteenth of August celebration.

Did many go down?

Oh, yes. Those people were so hospitable; they cooked for weeks ahead of time. [They'd have] anything you might imagine: ravioli, chicken, duck, lamb, spaghetti and wine. They invited all their friends down there. Everybody respected them until World War II came along. [The community that sponsored the celebration was of Italian descent.] Then they'd go in and start throwing raviolis around and disrupt [the celebration]. That was another beautiful custom that went by the wayside—but you couldn't blame them after all the work [they] expended to show their hospitality. Just a few spoiled it for others who had enjoyed it for years and years.

Where there are horses and livery stables, there must be blacksmiths. Were there any blacksmith shops here in Virginia City?

Well, the blacksmith was a very important part of the community. They had independent blacksmiths, and the blacksmith shop at the mines was a very important part of the operation. They said that a blacksmith on the Comstock could repair anything from a cog wheel to a child's sled.

Do you remember the locations of any of the blacksmith shops in the town?

Yes, there was one right up next to the Hungry Miner. Now that was a blacksmith shop.

What was its name? Do you remember?

No. It was run by a man by the name of Pelosi. Then there was Billy Luke's blacksmith shop up on the corner of B and Taylor. That was where Dicky Jose made his debut. He worked for Billy Luke in the blacksmith shop. Dicky Jose was a great singer that they discovered in Virginia City. My grandfather knew him personally when he worked for Billy Luke.

Did he sing while he pounded iron?

Oh, yes. He was of Cornish descent, and he sang all the time.

What did your father do in the mines?

He was a miner, a hard rock miner. He worked in the Union; he worked in the C & C; and for a very short time in the Ward. The Ward was a tough one, very hot. He didn't stay there any longer than he had to.

Ice was a problem, wasn't it?

Ice was a problem. But they had an ice house [on the Divide], and they used to store tons of ice every winter. They'd cut the ice in the reservoir and store it in the ice house up there. They put it down with sawdust. Every morning you'd see those big 4-horse teams going to the mines with their big loads of ice to send down underground. They had barrels down there they'd fill with ice. The men would come out of working in those hot holes and jump in these barrels and pour

ice water over them. No wonder they died of pneumonia! It didn't do much for their body.

When your father worked in the mines what shift was he on?

Oh, they changed shifts. They didn't get day shift all the time. It was 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00, and night shift was 11:00 to 7:00. I guess it was 2-week passes, because they'd be just getting adjusted to one shift when it'd be time to upset the whole cart again and your meal schedule and everything. They all liked morning shift; afternoon wasn't too bad, but they sure hated night shift.

In those days, too, the steam whistle for the mines would blow at 7:00, 11:00 and 3:00—when they were changing the shifts. That's something we missed as the larger mines closed down: steam whistles. If there was a fire or a real emergency, the steam whistles would go into action. I can remember Armistice in 1918. That was the first indication. There was a telegraph office here—we didn't have radios or anything—and every 3 or 4 hours they'd put a little telegram in the window [telling] how the negotiations were going. But to be awakened at 7:00 in the morning by those steam whistles all blowing at the same time, the church bells ringing, it's something you never forget!

That's how you knew something good had happened?

Oh, we knew it had to be the end of the war.

When your father was working in the mine, he had to work with other men on a shift. Do you know how many miners worked on the various shifts at a time?

Oh, I would say there would be easy 50 to a shift. They'd work at different levels. Sometimes there might be 4 miners at one time working up in the face. But then they would have these little drifts and tunnels they would be off sampling, too, and seeing how far the ore extended.¹

Do you remember the names of any of the men your father worked with in the mines?

Probably McDonalds, Muckels, and Dunns—Dunns were a mining family—Barrys, Lamertons, Camerons, James, Daley—Jimmy Daley was on the pumps—and, of course, the Byrnes. They were all working in the mines in my father's time.

Is there anything else you remember about the time when your father was working in the mines that you'd like to tell us?

Well, when there'd be a disaster—there were times when there'd be lives lost—the whole community'd rush out, just like you see now in the coal mines. Everybody was there to see what the outcome of it was. It was a very sad time. They'd all join hands and do what they could for the family. The amazing thing was in the early days when they'd have fatalities in the mines—they didn't have NIC or any compensation—[they'd] take up a public donation. And if the poor widow was left they'd wrestle her enough washing to keep her larder filled; she'd take in washing and things like this. They were always looking out for the victims of disasters.

One of the disasters that we hear about were mine fires. Were there any mine fires that you can remember?

I don't remember, but I heard tell about a mine fire: how the miners had taken a level and came to what should have been an escape, but when they got there the gate was locked on the outside—it was sheet iron—and they couldn't get out. They perished.

Do you remember which mine that was in?

I guess that was the fire in Gold Hill at the Yellow Jacket mine.

Were there other mine disasters you remember?

Well, right where the swimming pool is now I can remember a disaster, about 1917—maybe a little later than that. They had what they called chairs; a chair was really a 2-by-4 that would close off the entrance to the shaft, and whoever had used the cage last hadn't put the chairs up. A man came out pushing an ore cart, and he keeps pushing the ore car, thinking that the cage was there. The cage wasn't there; he went down to the sump.

We'd always hear these stories where the man falls so far even the shoes leave his feet. Everybody'd recite that, "Well, I hear that he didn't have his shoes on when he hit the bottom." It didn't make any difference at that stage whether he did or didn't!

1. According to Dan De Quille (William Wright), "Drifts are openings or galleries from four to six feet in width and from six to eight feet in height, opened along the course of the vein. They are generally run along one of the walls of the vein, in the 'country rock' (rock outside the vein) as that contains no lime and therefore stands best and does not swell and crush the timbers." Dan De Quille (William Wright), *The Big Bonanza* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 233.

No. Mining was a hard occupation.

It was terrible the way it was conducted. But now they have mucking machines, and drilling machines are improved. And the exploration they have.. they get their assay reports so fast, there's no going for a week before you find out whether you're in ore or waste. Their methods of refining it have improved [too]. It's too bad we didn't have these modern methods when they were in *borrasca*, because there were fortunes left underground.² Tons of high grade ore were dumped over the waste dump before they got the returns from the assay office. That was good ore—you shouldn't be dumping it on the dumps. That's where they found these little pockets in later years.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your father?

No. I think that just about covers it. He liked to chase horses. He was a fireman and a miner. He died when he was 49. This is the thing, I thought when you were 60 you were an old person, and now [I know] life doesn't begin till age 60! I remember my grandfather Daley was only 61 when he passed away, and I thought he'd been a real old man for at least 10 years! He used to put on a little hat when he'd go to bed; my mother had to bring his breakfasts to bed before he could get circulated and get out. I thought, "Gosh, I hope I never live to be that old."

Well, when people work hard, I think it takes its toll.

Yes, it takes a lot out of them. In his early life, too—living on a farm and everything—he was probably burned out.

I'm very interested in women's activities in Virginia City in the early part of this century. I was hoping that you could tell us something about your mother, Etta Daley Hinch, and what she did.

Well, all the girls my mother's age either sang or played the piano. They did miles of embroidery work—they enjoyed needlework. Of course, when they were growing up the sisters had a convent here, and that had a great influence on the young people—whether they were Catholics or not. They naturally learned to do needlepoint and at least were introduced to music. It was a fine influence on them. But women didn't get to vote till nearly the 1920s, so they didn't get out and talk politics much. They stayed at home and did their politicking at home. But they liked to play cards. They were great whist players and later on bridge players.

What is whist?

That's a card game, a lot like bridge, you don't hear about any more. You don't have to be such a rigid player as bridge to keep track of everybody. It was an enjoyable game. I'm just surprised so few people know anything about whist because in 1940 we had a club, and we played whist. We thought it was great stuff.

Where did your mother go to school?

At the Fourth Ward School, and also the First Ward School.

Why did she switch from the First Ward School to the Fourth Ward School?

2. *Borrasca*: Spanish word for "tempest" or "storm." Adopted by American miners from the Mexican mining usage of barren rock or exhaustion of a mine.

Well, the First Ward School usually had just up to the first 5 grades, and then you went to the Fourth Ward School. And in the meantime there was a Third Ward School right alongside the Catholic church. I don't think my mother ever went to the Third Ward School because she was born in 1887, and by that time the big populations [of] school children were over. But there was a Third Ward School right alongside the Catholic church.

Where was the First Ward School located?

Right where this rest area is where you come in from Reno—where the picnic tables are. That's where the First Ward School was.

Could you describe it for us?

It was 3 stories high and had 4 classrooms. They took care of the first 5 grades there, and then they switched them up to the Fourth Ward School. They also had first, second, third and fourth grades at the Fourth Ward School. There was also a school in Gold Hill. It burned down about 1938. It also had quite a few students.

When you transferred over to the Fourth Ward School, could you go all the way through high school?

Yes, graduate right through high school. It was a grammar school and a high school in the same building.

You mentioned that your mother was influenced by the convent. Could you tell me what organization it was that founded the convent?

The Sisters of Charity organized it, and they also had an orphanage, originally down where the arts center is now. Then, when

the Sisters of Charity left here, the county took over that building. It became the county hospital. It operated until 1940 and then wasn't used for years. Now it's an arts center—a very successful arts center.

It was also a hospital you said?

Yes, the county operated that as a hospital. They used to take in people as they grew older and take care of them down there—the matron and the warden.

Did the Sisters of Charity arrive in Virginia City early in the city's history?

Yes, they did, very early. It seems to me they were away from Nevada for about 50 years; then they returned to open the school over in Carson City.

Who were some of the first Catholic priests to arrive in Virginia City?

Father Gallagher was one of the first priests to hold Mass in Virginia City, [and] Father Manogue. He later became Bishop Manogue. My grandfather knew Bishop Manogue.

Did your grandfather ever talk about Bishop Manogue?

Yes. He admired him because he was such a strapping, big Irishman. I think Bishop Manogue was just one of the fellows. He made friends and was well accepted by the miners. He was a miner himself, you know, and he spoke their language. He had a special niche in the hearts of all the miners.

Father Manogue virtually founded the church here in Virginia City, didn't he?

Yes, he was here for many years, and then he went to Sacramento where he was bishop of the diocese there.

What kind of work did your mother do?

She didn't work—except be a mother and a housewife. That's not work then. [laughs]

Could you describe the housework the women did in the early twentieth century?

Yes. Well, they all took a great delight in cooking. My mother was a wonderful cook. She always amazed me. Her food would melt in your mouth, and she'd try to tell me how—you know, how much of that, a dab of this and a dab of that. My dabs never turned out so tasty! I always felt a little frustrated. [laughs] But that was one of the fine arts—homemaking.

They did laundry differently then, didn't they?

You can say that again! Why, they played what we called the Irish piano—that's the washboard. My daughters never knew what it was to do heavy laundry. I remember one time when I was raising my family, I broke my wrist just before Christmastime. I had been expecting company to come. I loaded the washing machine, and right in the middle of washing the machine broke down. My oldest daughter looked at me [and said], "Oh Lord, Mother, what do we do now?"

I said, "Well, you'll have to go out in the shed, and in the back corner there's an Irish piano. Bring it in, and I'll show you how to use it."

She says, "A what!"

So I had to go out and show her what the Irish piano was, drag in the tub, put the washing out, get it rinsed and scrubbed and out on the line. She was horrified. She had no

idea it was such a process to get bed sheets clean. [laughs]

It was even hard to bake bread in those days, wasn't it?

Yes, it was an art that [my mother] enjoyed, and the house smelled so good. I think about that now when [people] say they're having a hard time of it. They couldn't cope with situations like we had during the Depression. We made jelly. I raised rabbits. I raised chickens. We had all the eggs the family needed. [And I] baked bread all the time. I don't think my granddaughters would go for that business. It's too easy to go to the store and put it in a basket.

Did you can a lot?

Everything. Our neighbor, Mrs. Haffey—she lived right on the corner of Carson and C Street—would get an old pickup truck, [and] we'd go miles for apples or plums. We picked wild blackberries. We went down Six Mile Canyon to where there was some old apple trees [and] picked apples down there. We'd get peaches. Or, we'd [take] plums [from] anybody who'd give us plums. We'd take anything! Tomatoes, peppers.... I pretty near lost my home the year we got cabbage at a bargain. I think we paid 1½ cent or 2 cents a pound for it, so my neighbor and I decided we'd make sauerkraut. You have to have made a batch of sauerkraut to really appreciate it. It must ferment behind the stove before you can put it in the jars. The kids would come in for lunch and [say], "When are you going to get rid of that stinky stuff!" I don't think any of them were particularly fond of sauerkraut.

You must have had a lot of fruit jars?

Yes. I [used to] say fruit jars kept me home during World War II, because by that time the boys were big enough to be employed in the shipyards, and we wouldn't have had to worry about them having to enlist. But I always said, "God, I could never move with all the fruit jars I have!" It was such an effort to get them together, [and I couldn't] think [of] giving them up just for the sake of getting out of Virginia City.

You mentioned that today women go buy these things at the store. What stores did your mother shop at?

Well, we had 2 or 3 grocery stores here. We had Halley's store in the early days. That was right in the middle of town—right up [where] the Visitors Bureau [is located today]. And John McGrath's store was right up next to where the Ponderosa Saloon is. And further up the street, across the street from the little yellow car, was N. C. Prater. Prater's store operated until just about 20 years ago. Out in the north end in the early days, I'd say till about 1915-1916, they had Charlie Noce's store. That was a general store. They were well supplied. And then, when the mines were operating, they had a company store down at the C & C mine. They used to get carloads of products in, and the miners would go down there and buy.

Could you tell me where your mother used to buy her clothes for the family?

Well, there was a Chinese mercantile store right at the corner of D and Union Street, Chung Kee's. They handled everything: shoes, coal oil in kegs to keep your lamps burning, whiskey in kegs, little 10 cents Chung Kee liners [a shot of whiskey followed by a drink of beer], overalls for the men, shoes for the

children and all kinds of readymade dresses. They operated till about 1925. Then we had Emmett Dwyer's clothing store where the Crystal Bar is. That burned down about 1918—that is, the inside of it burned out. Theresa Rodham had Fine Hats and Millinery for Madame. I think her ad is still up on the curtain at the opera house. Daisy Perkins—who married Dan Sullivan, Dr. John Sullivan's brother—had a millinery shop. Mrs. Sheehy had a millinery shop. It was very popular.

Where did the men buy their clothes in those days?

At Emmett Dwyer's; that was men's haberdashery. Chung Kee had overalls and things, but Emmett Dwyer had suits, dress-up shoes and shirts made to order. Jack and Ben Wade had a clothing store up where the present post office is situated. It was in front of the Marye building, and they had a fine line of clothes. They had tailor-made shirts and so forth. Then, too, in those days there were many fine seamstresses that would make men silk shirts. That was the thing if you could afford to have your shirts made. I guess it would cost all of \$6 or \$7 to have a silk shirt made.

Do you remember the names of any of the seamstresses?

Yes. Mrs. Cooney used to make shirts, and Mrs. Monahan was quite a dressmaker. They used to make wedding gowns at the house; they'd sew for weeks. If you were a seamstress you would get the girls all ready for the school year. You might go for a full week and stay right in the house and sew away, and you'd have your meals and a little gab session. It was quite an event to have a seamstress come. I don't imagine they ever made more than

a dollar a day with *all* their sewing. It was one way of getting your clothes made. Mrs. Eddy—Harry's Business Machines was part of her family—had a little mercantile store. You [could] get all kinds of yardages there, and she handled shoes. Just think of it; you could open a door and go into the little shops [with] bolts of goods piled high, and it always smelled so different from any place else you had ever been.

Did your mother belong to any social clubs or organizations?

No. She used to sing in the church choir, and in later years she belonged to the Women's Relief Corps which I think originally did a lot of charitable work.

Could you tell me about the Women's Relief Corps?

Well, it was organized as a patriotic organization, and it's still in existence today, [but] there isn't one in Virginia City. They had drill teams, and they'd go to other cities. The Virginia City group could sing down anyone. They had their own chaplain, and when they had a member pass away the chaplain would go up to the cemetery, and he'd read the prayer. Sometimes you'd have an entirely relief corps burial. I think there's none of that left in Virginia City [today], but then between the 1940s and 1960s everybody was very faithful about it.

When was the Women's Relief Corps founded?

The Civil War. It was a branch of the GAR [Grand Army of the Republic] if I'm not mistaken.

Where did the Women's Relief Corps meet?

Upstairs in the Eagles ball.

Where is that?

That's on B Street right down from Piper's Opera House, alongside the Knights of Pythias Hall. It's one of the buildings we've been able to make them see the value of, and it hasn't been sold for bricks. It got so that we used to get organized in the past to discourage this coming in and scavenging the buildings because they would pay a small amount. Then you wouldn't even be getting taxes from that building, so we put all kinds of blocks in their way, like dropping a brick on the street. The chief of police was always ready to arrest them and take them to jail for obstructing a main road, littering the streets and things like this. It was terrible. They were coming in and tearing down buildings for the bricks that they could reclaim. No sense to it; they could buy new bricks.

Do you have any idea what groups were doing this?

No. Just people [coming] through and looking for bricks because people liked to build their homes out of old bricks. They'd say, "Well, let's get that old building there; you can get them for less than a penny apiece, and I know we can get 40 cents for them."

When was this happening?

The 1930s, late 1930s, when things were tight. People were scrounging a dime anywhere.

Where did your parents live when you were growing up? Could you describe your home?

Well, when they were first married, my mother and father lived on Grandpa Daley's

property. There was a rental out in front, so they lived there for a while. Then they rented a house for a short time right straight across from where the center [the Senior Citizen's Center] is now. Then we had property about a mile north of town. It had an orchard and a barn—it was beautiful. That place burnt down in 1917, so we moved in behind the First Ward School, and that lasted about 5 years. Then it burnt down.

We were plagued by fire. Like the home north of here. That's where you had plenty of room, and we had rabbits, chickens, dogs, nice orchard with fruit, and my dad raised all our vegetables. We felt that we were very privileged, and we missed that home very much. Then we moved by the First Ward School. At that time we were going to the First Ward School, so that was very handy—just across the street. That was a 3-story building...no buildings close to it, and we got the wind on every corner of that house. I can remember when we slept way up in the top floor; you'd think the wind would stand that house on end.

The Washoe zephyrs?

Yes. They took a lot of getting used to. But the interesting thing is that all my life—I'm nearly 76—I have never had a permanent home south of Carson Street. I've lived on this end of town all the time. Never got around much! [laughs]

Describe your home near the First Ward School.

It was wood, brown on 3 sides, white on the front, a nice porch [and] Victorian architecture—nicely laid out. Of course, we had indoor plumbing—that was the big thing

around here then. We didn't have to file down the yard in the middle of the night. It was quite an attraction.

About how far away were the outhouses from the homes?

Well, usually at least 30 or 40 feet. In some cases they were a good 50 or 70 feet. [laughs]

Did your mother have a wood-burning stove?

Yes, I had one, too, for many years. I hated to give it up. [I] finally electrified the kitchen about 35 years ago, but in the wintertime you miss a coal-burning stove. Of course, now there's 6 of one and half dozen of the other. Coal is no longer cheap. Firewood isn't as available as it was. When the railroad ran, they brought in the carloads of wood. Now you have to haul your own wood. Things change, and you have to change with them.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your houses?

No, except to say we lived in 5 different houses north of Carson Street—2 of them since I was married. I've lived in the house I'm in now since 1930—54 years.

Where are you living now?

[I live in] the first house coming into town [from Reno], opposite the highway park.

Could you tell me something about your current home?

I have quite a bit of footage there. It's just a one-story house, so it's easily heated. The earliest deeds we have on that house date

back to 1872. It was there before the [1875] fire; the fire never reached [the] north, so it's not a modern house.

Do you remember who owned it prior to you?

The Barneys, Evanses, Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Woods. We have all the old deeds to it.

Now that we have discussed your family history and some of the experiences your parents passed on to you, I think I would like to start talking about your own biography. First I think we should talk about your childhood. Where did you go to school?

My first schooling days were spent at the First Ward School which was at the extreme north end of town. At that time [there were] 2 teachers, [and] they [taught] the first 5 grades. After you completed the fifth grade you went to the Fourth Ward School to complete your grammar school education. I went to the Fourth Ward School for the fourth grade [because] they discontinued the fourth and fifth grades at the First Ward at that time. I entered the Fourth Ward School in the fourth grade and went through high school there.

Do you remember the names of your teachers while you were in the First Ward School?

Yes, my first teacher was Katie Quirk. She was a member of the Blake family—an interesting pioneer family. There were 3 brothers who came from Ireland and settled in California. They heard about the fabulous Comstock, and the 3 brothers came to the Comstock, and between them they had 32 children. This is the Blake family that had the *Chronicle*. I was talking to a Blake girl from San Jose, and her brother, Leslie Blake, was

connected with the *Carson Appeal* for many years. She told me that about 25 years ago all those 32 descendants had just about died out. Then she said all of the sudden prosperity struck again, and now it's back up to 37. so she supposes there'll always be a Comstock Blake family to carry on the traditions.

Do you remember the name of your other teacher?

Kate O'Neil. I guess she taught my father, too. She was the head teacher at the First Ward School. [A] little short woman, but she sure ruled with an iron hand. Nobody fooled around with Kate.

Could you tell me something about your schoolmates when you went to the First Ward School?

Oh, we used to take little rocks and make little rock houses, and you couldn't go in your neighbor's house without [a] knock on the door. We were allowed to bring our dolls to school. And every Friday was art day. Local artists would come out and give us art lessons, and that was always a day to look forward to. They also had a normal school in Virginia City in that time, and Friday they'd alternate: one Friday we'd have art, and the next Friday the girls from the normal school would come up, and we'd have folk dancing. Somebody'd play the piano, and we'd square dance and do all those nice things that meant so much, [since] we had no television or cowboy bands.

Your community sounds like it was well integrated.

It was like one big family. It was delightful, and this carried on all the 50 years. I could see

that here. You know, even then when you went to First Ward School the boys wanted to play baseball, [but] they were adverse to asking the girls to come and fill out the team for them. [They] didn't know that we were struggling to get women's rights, that 50 years from then we'd *demand* a place on their team.

Could you tell me what you and your friends did after school was over?

Well, we'd be allowed to play until dusk; then it was schoolwork, dinner and to bed early.

What other games would you play?

Oh, run, sheep, run and follow the leader.

What is run, sheep, run?

Well, it's like a hide-and-go-seek game. You choose up sides; one was to hide, and the other was to seek them out. The leader, when they get close to you and there might be a chance of them coming home and tapping in for you, would say, "Run, sheep, run!" And everybody'd run to tap base. Hard on shoe leather, but good exercise.

Could you describe some of your teachers at the Fourth Ward School?

Yes. When I went to the Fourth Ward School one of my teachers was Miss Myrtle McGrath, who later married William Boyle, a United States Attorney for the state of Nevada. I also had Mr. Dilworth at the Fourth Ward School. He had retired from the University of California, Berkeley and had collaborated on writing mathematic textbooks. We always felt fortunate to have him. He really put math

in our heads that stayed there. Tony Zeni was another teacher. He had gone through the university by the time he was 21 years old; he came up as a history teacher, but his real love was foreign language. So, when we'd go in for ancient history we'd get our Spanish done! Another high school teacher was Gary Eden. And Marion McKenzie, a local girl, was a teacher in the eighth grade at the Fourth Ward School. Very nice teachers and very capable.

Do you remember the names of some of the children you went to school with at the Fourth Ward School?

Oh, yes. They don't fade from your memory. Sylvia Poldanus is one of the girls who is still alive. Ty Cobb was one of the persons I remember because he keeps in touch all the time. Ty is not as old as I am. When he was sports editor of the *Nevada State Journal* he always saw that Virginia City got its share of publicity.

Well, Virginia City's basketball teams always did quite well, as I recall. He probably had a lot to cover?

He had his work cut out for him. They always made headlines. They were great competitors. Of course, some said, "Oh well, they have nothing else to do up there but bang that ball up that hoop. No wonder they're basketball players." But they overlook the fact that [our boys] went in for track meets at that time, and they were competing against bigger schools. They always came home with their share of the trophies. We've never had to apologize for them.

It's got to be a tradition here. We always contended that basketball players were made,

not born, because we'd have [a] high school attendance of maybe 16 to 25 students and [still] turn out a basketball team. We *make* them. [laughs]

In 1929 the high school here had a string of victories—16 straight. Then, when it came time for the state tournament, they were beat by Carson by one point. That was pretty tough because if you lost the first game you didn't get in the state tournament. We had a basketball team that wasn't ashamed to cry, and there were tears shed that week. I don't think they ever quite got over it.

Could you tell me of some of your high school activities?

By the time I went to high school we had a home ec department: sewing, homemaking and cooking. We appreciated that. And we were allowed to entertain the PTA a couple of times a year, fix the refreshments, and, of course, we'd fix breakfast for classmates. The freshmen would fix breakfast [for] sophomores; sophomores would C ix it for the juniors—that occupied quite a bit of time. There was always something going on. The home ec department was very well kept up, and we had capable teachers.

Do you remember the name of your home ec teachers in high school?

One of them was married to Gary Eden. Then we had a local girl; her name was Louise Sullivan. She was a graduate of the University of Nevada and later married a boy from Iowa—Harker. They have both passed away since then, but her daughter is in Alaska and visits us quite often. Thelma Jenkins was also a home ec teacher. She came from out around Fallon. [It] seemed that when they graduated

from the University of Nevada there was always an opening in our local schools for our local graduates.

What else did you take when you were going to high school here?

Oh, we had a foreign language and math and, of course, history—3 years of history was required—and English. We had a pretty well-rounded out program.

When you and your friends were not attending school in your teenage years, where did you hang out?

Well, we had an ice cream parlor; we'd go up there for ice cream sodas. And in the wintertime if you could rustle [up] enough [you'd] get a tamale. I think they cost 20 cents or 25 cents. That was a big event going uptown and having a tamale.

Could you tell me the name of the ice cream parlor?

Yes. Frank Sullivan had an ice cream parlor, and of course, Mr. Marks's father [Bill Marks, Sr.] had the Crystal Bar—a place where the young folks were always welcome. Bill Marks was a wonderful person. He made me feel like a million dollars when I went in there with my friends. [If we] were getting goodies he'd say, "Get what you want; I'll trust you." So he gave credit. That was a big item. I don't think he ever lost much. [laughs]

The Crystal Bar dates from the earliest days of the Comstock, and it is still in operation?

When Mr. Marks [first] had it, it was up where the Washoe Club is; then over a

disagreement with the landlord, he just picked up his chandeliers and moved right down to the corner. They are the original crystal chandeliers. When you have the same family operating a business for close to 90 years you get very, very attached to them.

I was wondering if you could tell me the location of the other ice cream parlor.

Frank Sullivan's was where Calamity Jane's Bar is now in the main part of town. Frank Sullivan was a brother to Dr. John Sullivan who later on moved to Reno and raised his family there.

Were there other activities that you engaged in as a teenager?

Oh, yes. We liked to play baseball in the summers. And of course, hiking; it was a great trip to take a lunch and [go] up to Lone Rock [where] the flumes ran out. You could always cool your feet under the running water—a great spot for picnicking. [You could] climb up on the rock and get a beautiful panoramic view of the city. [And] we'd have hikes up to the flagpole at the top of Mount Davidson.

One of the things when I was in high school was the dances. We had [them at] the National Guard Hall as well as Piper's Opera House, and both those dance floors are built on railroad springs. The railroad springs were put up under the floor to absorb the shock of the miners stomping on it with their heavy boots when they danced jigs and reels. [That was] probably one reason why the buildings didn't collapse on the occasions when they were crowded. During the time I was in high school—when American City [had] that large reduction mill—the big thing [was to go] down there. Every time they erected a tank—

these great big tanks that they put the solution through—they would initiate it by having a dance in the tank. That was great stuff—get an orchestra down there in those big tanks, [and] the music stayed right in that. Taxis would run from Virginia City down to American Flat, so there [was] all kinds of transportation. You didn't have to have your own car to get back and forth. It was delightful, [the] tank dance; that was a big thing.

You mentioned American Flat. This was something that was very big in the 1920s, wasn't it?

Yes, that was the largest mill in the world at that time. They had a main haulage tunnel where they would draw ore from all the mining properties and take it to American Flat. But it proved to be a monster. They couldn't supply it with the amount of ore that was needed to keep it operating 24 hours a day. It took a lot of ore, and it was just too big for the operation here. It was dismantled and taken away.

At the time when that mill was in operation there was a little community down there. They even had a little country hospital and a doctor. They performed surgery down there on a couple of occasions. [Also there were] many little cottages. When it closed down the houses were just picked up and moved [to] where [U.S. Highway] 395 goes into Reno now. They put them where the railroad right-of-way is. They were just picked up and carted down. They were nice, modern, little compact homes. They'd put them on a truck and away they'd go. You'd see them next time you went into Reno by stage. Here'd be the same little houses sitting down there on the approach to Reno.

American Flat is deserted now?

Yes, and you know it goes way back in history. There was a time when they tried to have American Flat be the capital of the state of Nevada. There was a big hotel down there. It was on the main road between Virginia City and Carson City. [In] later years there were some Chinese down there. They would raise anything—any seed they'd put in the ground would produce for them. They had beautiful gardens down there...ample water. It was a really beautiful place to go and get vegetables. Another man had a big chicken ranch down there in, oh, 1917-1918—fresh chickens. It was a very nice spot.

[American Flat] is a part of the history of the people we're familiar with; like over in Jumbo. Drive down there now, there's nothing but rocks and ruts; but there were a lot of miners with their little prospect holes, doing a lot of leasing down through Jumbo. There was a stage line from Virginia City to Jumbo. They used to have a big wooden hotel out there that I can remember—probably 1912-1913—had a picture of the Katzenjammer kids painted on the side of it. It's one of those things that when you go down from the Jumbo Grade you're always looking for the Katzenjammer kids on the side of a hotel building.

While you were a teenager were there any social organizations in high school that you belonged to?

Oh, we had a Girls' Friendly Society, and we had 4-H activities which kept us pretty busy. They had a well-rounded program.

Where did these clubs meet?

The Girls' Friendly Society used to meet in various girls' houses, probably twice a month. They'd take turns having the meetings. And 4-H was held in school, usually in the home

ec department. We'd have parties down there. Of course, it didn't take much to make a party in those days: just sandwiches and coke was all that was required. You didn't have to have a lot of high-fidelity equipment to entertain. The girls would play the piano; they'd have group singing. That was ample.

Earlier we talked about social events that were celebrated in Virginia City during your mother and father's time. Were there fewer social events that occurred when you were in high school?

Yes, you could gradually see it burning out. Of course, the mining was beginning to decline, and all things change. I suppose it was the fact that Carson was becoming closer; Reno was becoming closer, and people were going there to attend programs. There was really no reason to attract those people here as the population declined.

It was fun when the carnivals used to come to town. We'd have them 3 or 4 times a year, and that was always a welcome sight. You could go down and maybe for \$1 [or] 75 cents you could take in the carnival; have your rides on the merry-go-round, on the Ferris wheel and everything. We had the train then, and it was no big problem to bring them in by train. Now, with public liabilities and traveling expenses they never make it up Geiger Grade any more.

The new Geiger Grade road was something that brought you a little closer to Reno, wasn't it?

Yes, it was, and it had a great deal to do with tourism developing, too. It seemed that around the 1940s people were beginning to discover what a delightful place [the] Comstock was to visit. Just about the time they were finding that out, along came World War II and the gas program. It cut off tourism.

But right after that they completed this new road going to Reno—a high gear road.

Was the old Geiger Grade road difficult to travel on?

There were places so bad on [old] Geiger Grade that coming back from basketball games the men would shovel the snow drifts in the winter. [At] Alexander Springs and another part down by Deadman's Point they'd make everybody except the driver get out of the car, and the men would stand there and push against that car to keep it from going over the edge. The road was so bad, once you got settled in the ruts, you'd have a very good chance of just staying there! But they never missed any basketball games.

Going to basketball games was a community activity, then?

It certainly was. When they'd go out to play Fallon.—Fallon's a long way, pretty near 60 miles the way they'd have to go—they had a truck go down to Fort Churchill with coffee, and a couple of men would volunteer to stay there and gather firewood. Coming back from Fallon—that big long trek back from Fallon to Virginia City—they'd stop and have wienies and coffee. Somebody played the harmonica or had an accordion, [and] they would dance until the sun came up. They weren't going to get lost between Fort Churchill and Virginia City. When the whole community joins in things like that there's so much fun to it.

Were there other activities that you want to tell us about while you were in high school?

Well, I think that was mostly it, except they were always sticklers for their Labor Day

celebration. On September, the miners were strong for Labor Day.

What did you do after high school?

Well, I became a housewife and very busy raising a family. All toy children were born in Virginia City in the period when people were finding out it was very fashionable to go to Reno for having children. There again, I had my favorite family doctor, and there was something about being born in Virginia City that we were very proud about.

Could you tell us something about the man you married?

Well, I married John Byrne. His grandfather, John Malladen, came to Virginia City about 1869. Before that he had lived in New Orleans. Grandpa Malladen came from Bavaria when he was a very young boy and settled in Louisiana. His wife came over from Germany. She had charge of a plantation down in New Orleans. She used to train the colored girls and be in charge of colored girls for the kitchen down there. They loved Louisiana—New Orleans.

But after the Civil War they said conditions were terrible; carpetbaggers coming down wanted to take over everything. Colored folks were very unhappy at the change it brought in their lives. They said it was really sad. They had felt so secure at the plantation before, and when they were free they had to get out and get their own place. They weren't as free as it sounded. They just couldn't tolerate it.

Grandpa Malladen took the team and loaded up the wagon, and they came to Nevada and settled at Empire, right out of Carson City. Morgan Mill was located there, and Grandpa Malladen used to haul supplies to the mill. Then he moved onto the

Comstock. He had a brother, Philip Malladen, and they ran the express business. They're listed in the [city] directory of 1878 that Mrs. Marks has: John and Philip Malladen. They were here at the time of the big fire; they said they were offered as much as \$50 to move a trunk of valuables from the Divide out to the north end to escape the flames. They had very vivid memories of the early days there.

Could you describe the location of the express office?

The express office was [Grandpa Malladen's] barn, out in the north end of town where we lived all these years.

My husband's father was Frank Byrne; his father was Mike Byrne who came here from Ireland. I didn't know too much of Mike Byrne because he passed away probably 15-20 years before I was born, so we just knew what we heard from the family. My husband's mother died [when he] was only 3 years old, so we didn't know too much about the Byrne family. But there were 2 brothers here, and one brother was a miner. My husband's father for many years was night officer here, and fireman. We have a long history of firemen in the family.

So, your husband also grew up in Virginia City?

Yes. He was a great horse lover, too. In fact, as we grew up we used to tease him and call him Harry Cary. Harry Cary was the cowboy that was appearing in the flicks all the time. That was his nickname here. He used to get so aggravated, he'd threaten to lasso you and chase you with the horse.

When did you marry your husband?

In 1924.

What was he doing at that time?

He had a hauling business here. He hauled freight. I guess it was for his grandfather. He thought that was the greatest profession in the world—horses—and he enjoyed people. With the railroad coming in he was always having some materials brought in. It was a good living.

After the freight business, what did your husband do?

Well, for a while we were raising a family there, and we started with one cow, and before we knew it we had 22 cows, so naturally we went into the dairy business. [Then] we were struck by the Depression. The sad thing was when people'd have no money and you'd have milk, why, you're not going to keep the milk—the milk's not going to do you any good—so we distributed it. We just had to give up with the cows. It was the wrong time and the wrong place for a dairy business.

When did the Depression hit Virginia City?

It was bad in 1932 because things probably reached their low point then. I can remember when Franklin Roosevelt took office how he gave the people heart. It just seemed like you had hit rock bottom; there was no hope anywhere. The hypnotism of that man—how he would sit there and talk on the radio and tell people there's nothing to fear but fear itself—and people believed him and pulled out of it. Some things you just had to go through.

That was really the bad part of the Depression. The banks were broke. I remember all the money we had was tied up. We got part of it back afterwards, but it was a hard period. It started in 1929; by 1932 you were

really scraping bottom around here. And at that time the mines closed down. There was just no hope anywhere—what future we had for the town.

The 1930s was really a very quiet time around here. It was the time when people were buying up houses and tearing them down for the firewood because they weren't going to be paying taxes on it. We probably paid \$8 or \$10 a year in property tax, which people really resisted paying. The town was dead and never wanted to come back. It was heartbreaking. If it weren't for just a handful of hard-nosed Comstockers there wouldn't have been a Virginia City, because the people who stuck it out—there was nothing to keep them here, no mines operating, no work—just got by the best way we could. It turned out to be worth it. We're very happy we did stick it out, now.

During the 1930s the government tried to help communities that were having a hard time. Was the new Geiger Grade road a WPA [Works Progress Administration] projects?

No, but the road going down to Carson City was a WPA project. [This road was an alternate route to Carson City built in 1936-1937.] The Geiger Grade project was put in with federal funds around 1940. [The new Geiger Grade road was built between 1936 and 1938. It was financed primarily by federal aid projects, but a small portion of it was built with WPA funds.] Of course, by that time the railroad had ceased to run, too, so it was necessary to get a road that trucks could traverse without making a day and a half journey out of it.

Did many men from Virginia City work on the Carson road during the Depression?

Yes, quite a few at that time. The last of the mines had closed down. The men were still debating it they'd move or stick it out; pretty near the whole work force on this road were people who lived in Virginia City—old miners, young miners. They all took a pass at it. They were doing a lot of hand work with culverts—things now that they would do with machinery. They did it and stuck it out.

Were there any mines open in Virginia City during the 1930s?

Yes. At that time they were taking quicksilver out of the deposit about 5 miles north of here. Men leased and worked for the Castle Peak Quicksilver Mining Company. Then they started to timber the New York shaft down through Gold Hill. It wasn't big scale employment, but if you were a miner and understood timber there was work. That's what my husband did. He went down and helped retimber the New York shaft. It was limited; there was no big production going on.

Then in the 1940s, over at the Arizona Comstock, they began to revitalize mining. That kept some people around—at least there was a livelihood for the town. It was no big scale operation, but it did give you an existence.

In 1942 there was a big fire on the Divide. Could you tell me something about that?

Yes, I could because 2 of my sons were in Nick Stosic's house up on the Divide when the fire started. When the fire cut we had no way of knowing whose house burned down and where it started or anything else. We spent some anxious hours. My husband went to fight the fire, and he said, "Now don't wait for word. If it looks like it's going to come

north get into Reno. The Red Cross will set up something, and I'll contact you there. Don't wait for me because we just won't have any way of contacting you.

I remember the flames. Oil barrels would explode [and] blow shingles up past Mount Davidson; then they'd circle around, then settle way out north. Shingles were falling out in the yard, and there wasn't a shovel left to put dirt on them or anything. I remember going out to the shed and getting an ax and chopping the shingles that were blowing out there and covering them with dirt.

And then as I sat there, I thought [of] one of my neighbors. She was getting close to 90 years old, and [the] last thing my husband said was, "Now, if you leave town, make sure and take Mary Ed with you."

So I had to go alert her. [I said] "Don't worry if we have to move; there'll be room in my car for you."

And Billy Cobb, Ty Cobb's father, used to drive the bus to Reno. He went and got the bus out and got all the old folks in his neighborhood, put them on the bus, brought them out to the north end of town (where the park is now) and kept them there. He was going to have a head start to get them out of town if the flames came over the mark where the glory hole was.

And I remember at that time we had coffee rationing. In my compassion I could see they [the firefighters] needed some hot coffee, so I took all my precious coffee and made pots of coffee and took it up. They had a canteen set up by the Fourth Ward School, and I left the hot coffee there. Then within 5 or 6 hours the Red Cross from Reno had set up their canteen, and that part was over. Those first hours were hectic; it was in November, bitter cold, wind blowing—terrible conditions. They lost between 40 and 45 homes in that

one section. That was heartbreaking. [The number of homes that were lost in this fire on the Divide is uncertain.]

How did World War II affect Virginia City?

The last of the mines were holding out on a shoestring at that time. That's when they decided that the men should either go in the service or go to copper mines because copper was needed for the defense of the country. [If] you don't keep mining machinery operating it deteriorates rapidly, so the mine owners sold the machinery. They thought it would be just a matter of reestablishing themselves when the war was over. It didn't work out that way. They were never compensated for the losses they suffered when they closed the mines. It was nip and tuck until the price of gold went up, and it was profitable to prospect and look for these new workings that have been developing over the past few years.

So the mines in Virginia City virtually closed with the Second World War?

Yes. That finished off the mining phase for that period of time.

What was your husband doing after the mines closed?

He went to work for the county. He was chief of police and also road supervisor. It was a livelihood, but he was always dreaming of the day when mining would be revived.

Could you tell us of some of your husband's experiences after the 1940s?

Well, during the 1950s we were having quite a problem with roughnecks coming in

on motorcycles and trying to take the town over. We have very few men on the police force, and that's when my husband was the chief of police. The entire force was comprised [of] the constable, the sheriff, the night man and the chief of police; [yet] they had to keep the whole town under control. They did a pretty good job of it, too. But times changed, too, now, you know. If they had to stop and read every one of them their rights it probably never would have been as well controlled as it was.

Let's talk now a little bit about your experiences raising your children in Virginia City. What were the names of your children, and when were they born?

My oldest son, John, was born in 1925. My son, Frank, was born in 1927. My daughter, Mary Ruth, was born in 1929. Another daughter was born in December 1930. Patricia [was] born in 1932, and Alice [was] born in 1934. I was very busy for about 10 years. But it was only a wink of the eye, and they were raised, going away and starting their own homes and families.

The school was so small [then] I used to say, "Oh, I don't know how those poor kids stand going to a school that small... no activities." One year there were only 9 people in the high school student body. But there wasn't much they missed because the group that they were with was just like one big family. If they were going to a show they all went together. You didn't have to worry because the boys who took them treated them like sisters—they were well cared for, and you never had to worry about them getting in trouble or going out of town. It was just like your own family. I think it's a wonderful way to raise a family where you're so concerned with everybody else. Like I say, 2 or 3 of those

students wouldn't sneak off and go to a show without asking the other 7 or 8 to go along. It was nice to see them share. They didn't feel they missed too much.

Where did your children go to school?

At the Fourth Ward School. They all didn't graduate from the Fourth Ward School because the new school opened in 1936. But 4 of them started to school at the Fourth Ward School.

Could you describe the location of where the new school was built in 1936?

The new school was built in front of the Catholic church. It fits in good with the other buildings around there. Since then we've put up the second building. Just imagine, for years we only had one school building. Now we have 2, and from what I understand we have over 200 students in the 2 buildings. So it really has grown from the time when they had 9 students in high school. They combined with Dayton, so they could get 5 or 6 stalwarts to floor a basketball team.

Basketball was still important, then?

Yes, it was still important. They had to take 2 communities to get one team. Incidentally, I think during that time Bill Marks had just returned from the service, [and] he was the coach. He didn't win many games, but they had a lot of fun.

We always felt very close to Dayton because they were in the same situation we were. When my oldest son was in his first year [of] high school they had a basketball team; quite a few of those boys live around Reno who played on that team, but they had no gym. They didn't have one practice session.

They used to go down to Dayton to practice. They were just building the gym here, and for one whole season they were a basketball team without a home court.

The people in Virginia City had played basketball in the National Guard Hall, hadn't they?

Yes.

When did that get removed so they could no longer play there?

Well, I think that was during the 1930s. They always accused a disgruntled miner of putting a charge of powder under it. [It] blew the back end of it out, and it had to be taken down. That was a lovely building, too. Recently a friend of mine had some pictures of the National Guard Hall. You didn't realize walking past it every day what a beautiful building it was. It had heavy plate glass windows. They had a stock exchange in the upstairs floors of it. It was really a marvelous building, but that, too, went down. Then they moved up to Piper's Opera House which had been for movies; it was cold, but it was a place to play basketball.

Were there other major buildings that were around before the 1930s that vanished during the 1930s?

Yes, we lost the Virginia Hotel, and the Wells Fargo building was taken down.

Could you describe their locations?

They were right up where the Wagon Wheel restaurant is; that's south of [where] the firemen's museum [is] now. There was some nice buildings in there that disappeared.

What did the Virginia Hotel look like?

It had a brick front. It was 3 stories high, and miners had rooms there. Pop Tarish had a restaurant there [with] a little bar in front. He had come from Tonopah. It was well managed and a nice, clean building.

During that time we were having problems in the wintertime, [for] when it froze up you were without water until the spring. In 1957 Curtis Wright put some money into the system; they were going to have an industrial development down in this other part of the county. They leased the water company [and] put money into it to get the pipes put in. Since then the county has become involved in it. They got loans, and they've fixed it up. Some of those pipes have been in since the 1860s. You wouldn't believe the pipes that were torn out. [Although Curtis Wright was instrumental in upgrading Virginia City's water system, their plans for an industrial development were never realized.]

We had wooden flumes bringing the water into Virginia City up to that time. Those flumes were put in in 1864. So, pretty near 100 years. Some of the people were able to get some of those old flume boards. One woman I know has some of the old flume boards [and] lined her kitchen with them. It looks so rustic, and what a beautiful way to decorate. You can't duplicate the beauty of those boards. But the flumes had just about seen the last of their usefulness. Now they have pipes to bring the water in, and they have improved the storage capacity; so I don't think we'll ever face the terrible times that we had when we were left high and dry up on the hill.

[In the 1950s] the highway department would run a tank of water in and park it up by the museum. You'd pack your water home in jugs. That was treacherous because it was always snow, icy weather. It's a wonder

somebody didn't cut their head off packing a 5 gallon jug of water and falling down on top of it. It wasn't pleasant. And of course, bathing was a problem and sanitation. You can't imagine. You have to be without water to know how precious it is.

Well, it sounds like the mothers in Virginia City were spending a lot of time working to keep a household running.

You better believe it. If they couldn't wash, they'd go down to [the] Public Service Commission and just camp and complain. I think the Public Service Commission was as happy as we were to see water service restored. [laughter]

Before we started talking about the water project, I was asking you about other buildings that you noticed went down during the 1930s.

Well, we lost the Marye building. That was right in the center of town across from where the firemen's museum is now. That was a beautiful 3 story building, and that burnt down completely. That was where the post office is now. The post office was built probably 16 years ago. That left a terrible gap in the middle of town when we lost the Marye building.

What was the Marye building used for, and what did it look like?

It had store fronts right along C Street. That's where one of the places I mentioned as being a man's haberdashery years ago was—Ryan and Stenson's store. When I was small that was the first place I went where they put the money in the little cup and pulled the cord, and it would shoot up to the cashier's desk on the second floor, and you'd get your change out. We were fascinated by that; we

thought that was great. That was in probably 1912, 1913. These store fronts had solid glass panes right from the ground—probably 10 and 12 feet high. Beautiful buildings. And I remember Ryan and Stenson's store had a brass rail to protect the glass, so people wouldn't stagger into it—similar to the brass rail in the Crystal Bar now. It was very ornate and attracted a lot of attention.

Then right next to that was the building where the post office was housed for quite a while. That had big plate glass windows, and that was all wiped out in a fire. That building was owned originally by Helen Marye Thomas, who has given property to the University of Nevada. Her father was an ambassador to Russia at one time.

We lost [another] building in the main part of town in [the] early 1930s—where the Delta parking lot is. That left a big gap right in the middle of town, too. And we... have you seen the mural on Grandma's Fudge uptown?

I saw that while they were painting it.

I came down B Street the other day, and I think it's delightful. It looks like the International Hotel. It was a shame that we had to lose that hotel because it dominates every picture you see of the early days.

When did you lose it?

Nineteen-fourteen. My dad was fireman at that time, and he didn't get home for a week. That fire burnt for months because they had put the winter supply of coal in the back part of the building, and it just burned and burned and burned. Every time they'd go disturb the ruins the smoke would come up. It was still smoldering under there—twisted iron reinforcements and bent frames and everything. It was really a mess. It wasn't

cleaned out, either, until around the 1940s when they finally got all the rubble off and made a parking lot out of it. It was a big improvement. If we only had that hotel...can't you see what a big hotel that size would do for Virginia City?

It had the first elevator west of the Mississippi. For a long time that was where one of my daughters was an elevator operator when tourism first started coming to Virginia City. [The elevator was restored after the 1914 fire.] She'd pick up people on C Street level, take them up to B Street level, and they'd go out to the courthouse and Piper's Opera House. That was a big deal. And she has autographs of everyone. One that comes to mind is Olivia de Havilland who rode that elevator. The high school girls were always looking for autographs. I remember one day when she was in high school during the World War II there was a contingent of soldiers through there, and somebody came down and says, "You should have been uptown. We just seen John Payne." So a couple of girls ran up looking for John Payne to get his autograph. They were late checking back in.

Of course, the boys didn't like everything, and they told the principal, "Those girls were up there chasing around for John Payne's autograph."

So when the girls came back they had to go to the office, and the principal closed the door. He said, "I heard you girls were up on Main Street looking for John Payne's autograph," speaking very loud so the boys would listen.

They said, "Yes."

He said, "Did you get it?" Which they did. [laughs]

Talking about the buildings that have disappeared, this year we are celebrating the restoration of St. Mary's Church. You know, St. Mary's Church was really in bad shape.

Some years back many of the furnishings were moved to a museum up on C Street. That practically caused a civil war in town: pros and cons. We people who lived here, we felt very bad about this—not only Catholics—we would have felt just as bad if it had happened to any of the other churches. But of course, we kept the faith. We felt sure that everything would be returned; the Lord would look out for it. We're happy now because most of the things have been returned to the church, [and] the church has been restored. Probably when they started to knock the plaster off the walls they discovered that there were cracks in the building, so they encased it all within a cement shell. It might have collapsed if this weren't brought to the people's attention. Through the kindness of the man who owns the building, and persistent prayers, most of the things have been returned. The high altar has been restored and the side altars moved back. They have a beautiful red carpet throughout; the stained glass windows have been completed; we have a beautiful tile floor at the entrance of the church; and on September 16 we're having a celebration to celebrate the restoration of St. Mary's Church.

When did the restoration project begin?

It began under Father Meinecke. I guess [during] the last part of the 1960s. His main object was to see these things restored—things like the chandelier. It was easy to move it out and hard to get it back where it belongs. They hope they *will* have that in place by the time the celebration is held.

Of course, St. Mary's has actually been built 3 times, hasn't it?

That's right. The first ones were just frame buildings, and I guess the Washoe zephyrs

proved too much for Father Gallagher's church—it blew down. The second one was destroyed by fire. [It] was taken down to stop the spread of the flames in the big fire in Bishop Manogue's time [the 1875 fire]. So there's quite a bit of history in back of this Catholic church.

During the 1930s were people going to Mass there?

There's always been a congregation here. We didn't have a resident priest, but the priest would come from Carson or Reno—even from Fallon—and we did have Mass all through the 1930s.

Did the church have activities during the 1930s that you participated in?

Yes. In the 1930s they celebrated the Diamond Jubilee—about 1937. [The Diamond Jubilee was held September 8, 1935.] That brought thousands of people here. We have pictures of that celebration. The bishop came up and celebrated Mass. It was a nice celebration. And to think that we've gone pretty near 50 years over that time again. It's wonderful. We've had our centennial for St. Mary's, and we're very proud of the fact that we've been able to keep an active congregation and keep this beautiful monument, too.

Did the church have any social organizations to which you belonged?

Up till the present time they always had an altar society. Now they have a church council.

What is the Deanery?

The Deanery was a gathering of all the altar societies from the area: Carson City, Gardnerville, Dayton and Virginia City. They would meet once a month. They had officers. It was a little higher than the altar society and was a chance to get together, exchange ideas and see what you could do to promote your church and support it.

Were there other social organizations that you belonged to during the 1930s and 1940s that you'd like to tell us about?

Oh, the PTA, and I became very active in the March of Dimes. I served 30 years on that. As a mother I think there's no greater gratification. When my children were small they never ran a fever that I didn't imagine it certainly had to be polio. You heard such terrible stories about it. To see that controlled and absolutely wiped out is the most gratifying thing in the world. I was always so happy to be associated with the March of Dimes.

As a housewife during the 1930s where did you shop?

We had our own local merchants here. We had 3 grocery stores in town. N. C. Prater's operated till about 15 years ago. That was an old store. We have the Virginia Market here now.

Were there any beauty salons in Virginia City during the 1930s and 1940s?

Yes. Amazingly enough there were. We had Mary Shangrow. During the Depression people found money to get their hair done. [laughs] that was to keep their morale up. Yes, we had beauty shops.

Where was that located, the one you mentioned?

It was located right in the middle part of town, right across from Red's Old Fashioned Candies. Then there was also a beauty shop upstairs in the Marye building; and at that time they could also do hair at home. They didn't have such strict state regulations. Beauty operators weren't licensed operators, but they did a good job.

Where did the men get their hair cut during this period?

Barber shops. That was the thing, to go to the barber shop. There were usually 2 and 3 barber shops here; it finally whittled down to where there was just one—one of the faithful.

Could you name the barber shops?

Yes. Fred Strauss lived in Gold Hill; he had a barber shop. Tommy Huddy had a barber shop; and the last I remember was Louis Avansino. His family lives in Virginia City. He was our last barber. For about 30 years he had a barber shop.

Where was Mr. Avansino's barber shop?

It was up in the Marye building, too—the place that burned down. It was there for many years.

And what about the other barbers? Where were their shops?

One was down in what they called the Frederick House—right down [on] the corner of Union Street and C where you come down from Piper's Opera House. That also was destroyed by fire, but that's where Mr. Strauss was. And then up next door, next to the Delta, was Tom Huddy's little barber

shop. They were delightful. That's where the men got all their gossip and [a] shave and a haircut. Six bits; that was the old price of the day.

Did the women congregate in any single area during the 1930s and discuss their children and what not?

Their outlet was their church activities and relief corps. They didn't have the habit of swinging doors so much. That wasn't accepted that far back.

They chatted at home?

That's right. Over the back fence.

During the 1930s and 1940s your children were in school. Could you tell us something about the high school teachers at that time?

I have to get back right now in time. I guess Mr. Tueller was the principal in the high school when my son was in high school. Then right after the war Hugh Gallagher came, and he was principal of the high school down there for years and years. He was a splendid administrator. We just hated to see him leave when he retired; we hated to see his administration end. He was wonderful, an outstanding educator. We were very proud of him. He was a hometown boy who stayed on and certainly helped the students.

When did Walter Van Tilburg Clark teach here?

That was probably during the 1950s. He had an English class in school.

Could you tell us something about the introduction of tourism into Virginia City?

Well, as I said, the new Geiger Grade was largely responsible for people being able to find their way up here. You can't imagine the problems they [had] trying to negotiate old Geiger Grade: vapor locks on the cars, and the narrow road that scared the heart out of you to even look at, let alone ride over. But the high gear road...that led to the development of tourism. Then as I said, gas rationing during World War II slowed us down for a period; [but] after the war Beebe and Clegg found their way into Virginia City, and they gave the area untold publicity because the *Territorial Enterprise* was circulated worldwide. And the television series, "Bonanza," didn't hurt it! When I was at Piper's Opera House people would come from Germany—foreign countries—and want to know where the Cartwrights lived. They got that from the television series. That was part of the Comstock in their mind. All this publicity helped develop tourism. This year it looks like [tourism] is going to have a great incentive with the development of the tourism department. I think that's doing wonders for this area.

You mentioned Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg. Can you tell us something about them?

Beebe was a very colorful character, and he'd observe the cocktail hour. He'd go down to the mail, and he'd chat with everybody along the street. Then it would be time to go home and change for the cocktail hour. And if he was going to dine out, why, he'd go home and change his outfit again. He was a very colorful person, a good dresser. He liked to be recognized. He had the big Saint Bernard, Towser, and he loved to have people recognize him strolling along the street with the big Saint Bernard dog.

Lucius Beebe adopted [Virginia City] as his home, and he gave [it] tremendous publicity through the circulation of his *Territorial Enterprise*. He was also a railroad fan—he had his own private car. He did research on the Virginia & Truckee and other short line railroads. All of his writing reflected his love for this area. While he was on the *Territorial Enterprise* he sold ads to dealer houses. One—Antoinettes in New Orleans—had never had a paid advertisement until Lucius Beebe finagled an advertisement out of them. That was quite a feather in *his* hat.

If they [Beebe and Clegg] were out to dinner or visiting at the bar, and something would come up where nobody was quite sure of the date or who was there, they thought nothing of picking up the phone and calling halfway around the world to get the story. This really was most entertaining to the people who were in contact with them.

We were told that Virginia City became a popular spot for artists in the 1940s and 1950s; is this true?

Yes, it became well known as a haven for artists. One of our first artists to take up residence in Virginia City was Robert Caples, the son of Dr. Caples of Reno. He owned a home here, and he turned out some of his finest work while he was living here. And of course, Cal Bromund adopted Virginia City. Cal was famous for his pictures of horses and desert scenes. We loved Cal. He was down to earth, and he was an asset to the community. Lou Siegriest—the famous artist from San Francisco—lived here for a while.

Now they have developed the St. Mary's Art Center which is a tremendous success. We have artists who book classes down

there throughout the summer months. In talking to the director last week she said that practically all their classes were filled for next year because people make their reservations for the coming year before they go home from this year's classes. They turn out lovely work, and it's a nice class of people to have come into the community there. We wish we had more institutions like the St. Mary's Art Center.

Could you talk about the Comstock Civic Club? We understand they were associated with helping the artists.

Yes, the Comstock Civic Club was early in the 1950s, and Mae Bromund was instrumental in organizing it. They promoted art shows and were responsible for bringing many famous artists to the Comstock. [They] really opened up a new phase of development that had gone unnoticed for many years. They were also instrumental in forcing the water development. They were civic minded; you could say that for them. Maybe not so loud, but they kept trying at all times.

Virginia City has shown a great deal of interest in helping people understand its past. The Visitors Bureau, for example, could you tell me something about that?

Well, they have a short movie that probably runs 15 or 16 minutes, and that's open to the public. There's no fee to go in. They ask for a donation, but that's merely to keep tapes replaced and the inevitable insurance that has to be paid when you let the public use your building. It covers that expense, but it isn't a profit-making proposition. And it does give you a very good picture of what to see when you're in the Comstock. They know where

to go, what to see. It gives quite a bit of the background.

Could you describe the location of the Visitors Bureau?

The Visitors Bureau is right in the center of town, across from the Delta parking lot. It's easy to find, and they have a little gift shop there. They handle books. It's one of the nicer places to visit when the tourists are looking for background history.

You, yourself, have been actively engaged in the preservation of Virginia City's historic past. You were a member of the first Historic Commission, weren't you?

That's right. Governor [Mike] O'Callaghan appointed the first Historic Commission, and I was a member of that for 8 years. Afterwards I was secretary for the commission until I came down to the Senior Center. People never like a change; they don't like regulations, but it has been one of the finest things that's helped this area. It has opened the way to be able to apply for grants which, in cases like the courthouse and the Fourth Ward School, if we didn't have outside help they [would have] just collapsed. They issued the grant to restore the courthouse. There was a period of time when they were economy minded, and they lowered all the ceilings in the courthouse to save money. Well now, through the use of [the] grant, probably within the last 4 or 5 years all those lowered ceilings have been torn out and the old original ceilings restored. The chandeliers have been restored. It looks just like it should look.

The courthouse dates from very early in Virginia City's history. Could you describe that?

It's a beautiful building, and the woodwork in there would amaze you. I wonder if people realize what we have here; it's a treasure. [The] courtroom looks just like a courtroom should. When I go up the stairs I always wonder how many people have climbed these stairs and got out of breath as easily as I do. There was a movement underfoot one time to put an elevator in there; they thought it should be modernized. One of the wags down on the street said, "Heck no, when they elect anybody up here they stay there until they can no longer climb those stairs. If you were to put an elevator in, they'll be there until the undertaker drags them out!"

There's something special about the courthouse, isn't there?

It's our statue of justice on the front portico. For some reason she is not blindfolded, and the scales are not balanced. When we had the civic club here it was one of our projects to find out why that statue was cast that way. It was cast in Mississippi, and we wrote there; [but] there's no record of why it was cast, why it was turned out that way. But justice is not blind in Virginia City, and we certainly brag about it.

We were talking earlier about Virginia City's numerous social events in the early part of this century, and you suggested there were fewer of them around the 1930s. Could you tell me if this trend continued?

Yes, the 1940s was very quiet as far as celebration and events. Then there was a revival. Their rock drilling contest is a state contest now, and that was initiated right here in the Comstock. The hard rock drilling contest has attracted miners from Colorado,

Arizona and California. [There's] tremendous interest in that on Admission Day.

Do you know when that started?

Yes, during the 1950s it was great. They used to drill in the 1930s, but when there's no gas, no tourists and everything, there's no profit in promoting these things. But I think the interest is there, and I think you'll find it in all the mining camps.

Then in the 1950s, Bob Richards talked camels. Camels were brought to Nevada in [the] 1850s. They were brought here originally to pack salt to the mines because salt was necessary in the mills—the reduction of the ore. It was a great experiment of the government, these camels. They thought it would be cheap transportation, and I guess they thought that they would have a big herd of camels. [According to] the camel book that I read, it wasn't a success. They just didn't propagate in civilization, and the last of the camels were turned loose on the desert, down around Tonopah. They said in the early 1900s people would be going on along in a horse and buggy—horses hate camels; they can smell them a mile off, and they want to act up—[and] see a camel browsing on the deserts. [They] didn't know whether it was the sun or if they had lost their senses.

Bob Richards was a writer on the *Territorial Enterprise*, and in the early 1950s every year, he'd write a big article about the camel races that were to be held in Virginia City. He'd write article after article and get the interest up till people couldn't stand it any more. [He'd] tell you what camels were entered in the race, when the time of the race would be. [Then] he'd apologize: the camel was pregnant, or the camel broke a leg and couldn't make it. That went on for

3 or 4 years. Around 1956 or 1957—well, I guess last year they celebrated the 25 years; it was probably 1958—my husband, [who] was supervisor then, was having dinner and the phone rang. Hobart Leonard, the man from the water company, was on the phone wanting to know if he could speak to John. I said, “Yes,” and I said, “John, you’re wanted on the phone.”

Hobart Leonard said, “John? Can you come up? We’ve got to find a place to put these damned camels!”

Well, after 5 years of having your leg pulled like that you’re ready for almost anything. My husband just couldn’t believe it.

Hobart says, “You’d better get up here before they run them, turn them loose like they did before.” So he went up, and sure enough there were 3 or 4 camels they had gotten in from Indio, California. They had to put them in the county yard, and of course, dogs were barking and horses were starting to neigh. But it became a reality, and that has grown. This year they had camel races over in England. Last year [a] jockey from England came up and rode the camels, and they had representation in England for the Comstock camel races. so it has gotten to be quite an event, believe you me. Something we never anticipated 30 years ago.

Then, we have the Firemen’s Muster here. The firemen—our volunteer fire department’s very active—have learned to communicate with other fire departments. All these firemen certainly take their work to heart in what they have done in restoring the old pieces of fire-fighting equipment. It’s like a dream to see one of the parades. How do those cars still make it up and down, even on the level? They have fire drills and hose fights, and they come 2 and 3 days at a time. It’s a nice class of people; they enjoy the hospitality, and they cause no

trouble at all. We’re very happy to host the Firemen’s Muster.

This year they dedicated a flag pole out at the Firemen’s Cemetery. The forest service and the firemen got together, cleaned up the Firemen’s cemetery, grubbed the brush out and erected a flag pole. It gives us courage to try and get things done for the other cemeteries, because when people eventually die off there’s nobody to take care of these cemeteries. You see sagebrush growing up and nobody doing anything about it, and all those plots in the cemeteries are privately owned, so it just cuts off any help that you might be getting from the county. We don’t have a cemetery district here. It takes an example set by the firemen to show what can be done with cooperation. It would be wonderful if we could have the fences restored and brush grubbed out. You’d be surprised how many people visit the cemeteries. There was a time when it was just amazing the vandalism in the cemeteries. It became necessary to put a gate across the road to keep the cars and motorcycles from going in there. Some of the earlier motorcycles that came here thought it was great fun to go jumping curb to curb with their motorcycles. And there were stones packed away and vandalized. At one period of time they had a fascination for the square white marble headstones for the veterans’ graves. Turn them over where the engraving doesn’t show, and they make nice patio stones. So that’s why the gate was there. If they want to steal a headstone, they’ve got to pack it a mile through the lane. But even those old wooden markers they [say] make nice backs for the old rocking chairs—if you don’t mind “Sacred to the Memory” impressed on your back one afternoon after sitting in the shade rocking. [laughs] But that’s why the gate is there, and that’s why people have to walk in

that little short lane. And it gets so if we hear voices from the cemetery after dark [we] call the police, and they respond rapidly.

Of course, there was a period of time, too, when we had people here who wrote ghost stories about the ghosts of Virginia City. They'd write weird ideas about glowing headstones and the ghosts, and that was a great place for the university students to bring their initiates and make them go through the cemeteries. That was punishment, you know—make them walk down Six Mile Canyon, boo at them from behind the trees, and that was the ghost of the cemetery.

Can you remember what period this was?

Yes, during the 1960s. It got very bad then. We would like to see something done to preserve the cemeteries because they're certainly no credit to the area now, and it's nobody's fault except the generations dying out. There probably are enough people left who would be glad to contribute to the restoration of cemeteries. It just takes time and work to get at it.

We're very proud of the Senior Citizens Center. It's the first thing that has been done for the senior citizens in Storey County. It has turned out to be such an enjoyable venture to launch this building and see the pleasure the people get, and to find out how quick people come to rely on something like this. One woman will call every so often [and ask me to] look up a telephone number for her. She can't make out those numbers with her glasses. It's nice to know that they realize that there is someone here ready to help them—that they can get a ride to the doctor, or we'll get them a ride if they'd like to come down and enjoy lunch with us. I know it's going to

grow. People come here just to be a part of it [and] feel a personal interest in it. I know it's going to grow in the years to come.

You're the director of the Senior Citizens Center, aren't you?

I'm the first director, yes. That is something to live up to, and I very proud of it. I have very nice people working with me. You don't know how many nice people there are till you ask them to do something for you and find out how willing they are to become involved—in spite of what you read in the papers. This group down here is always anxious and asking if they can do something to help me. They will help their neighbors, and it makes them more aware that they're in a different generation—and I don't mean in a wheelchair, rocking chair generation. We have a sign out there one of the patrons brought down. It says, "We're not senior citizens; we're recycled teenagers." [laughs]

Now, the Senior Citizens Center was founded relatively recently, wasn't it?

Yes, it'll be 3 years this coming March. The money was obtained through a grant from the Fleischmann Foundation, when the Fleischmann fund was dispersed. This building was erected along Victorian lines. It certainly fits in with the atmosphere and the decor of the entire area. It's beautiful.

Then the county has developed a park compound. We're very proud of that, and the neighboring communities are finding out that it's a delightful place to come and picnic. And we have a beautiful swimming pool; that, too, was given to us by a grant from the Fleischmann Foundation. I wish more people

like Fleischmann would set up funds like that because [of] the good that was done by that foundation.

Well, Mrs. Byrne, I would like to thank you for giving us this interview.

It has been a pleasure, and I think it's something that was needed in this area. In the work [I do] with the alumni association letters go out, and you find out how many people are no longer on our mailing list; they're no longer with us. It just makes you aware that so much of this history's dying out. I think it's wonderful to start this sort of a project where people can get information and maybe come across some vital information that they weren't aware of.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Geiger Grade “scared the heart out of you to even look at, let alone ride over.”



“But justice is not blind in Virginia City.”



"It's the first thing that has been done for the senior citizens in Storey County."



"You see sagebrush growing up and nobody doing anything about it."



“The firemen got together [and] cleaned up the Firemen’s Cemetery.”

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